

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 526

EA 010 628

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TITLE How to Develop Job Descriptions.
PUB DATE 2 Apr 78
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National School Boards Association (38th, Anaheim, California, April 1-4, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Personnel; *Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Guidelines; *Occupational Information; *School Districts

ABSTRACT

After offering a number of general observations on the administrative operation of public school districts, the author describes his district's experience in developing job descriptions for administrative personnel and offers suggestions for other districts based on this experience. (JG)

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"HOW TO DEVELOP JOB DESCRIPTIONS"
(Clinic #B-24)

Annual Convention Clinic Session
National School Boards Association
Anaheim, California
April 2, 1978

EA 010 628

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL CONVENTION
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

APRIL 1-4, 1978

CLINIC B-24 - GARDEN GROVE ROOM #3
CONVENTION CENTER
SUNDAY, APRIL 2 - 9:00 A.M.

TOPIC: HOW TO DEVELOP JOB DESCRIPTIONS

PRESENTATION: H. VAUGHN PHELPS

INTRODUCTIONS:

TOPIC FORMAT:

WHAT SHOULD I BE DOING? IT ALL DEPENDS UPON WHAT YOU WISH TO
ACCOMPLISH!

INDEED, IF YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU WISH TO ACCOMPLISH, PERHAPS
IT WOULD BE BEST IF YOU DID NOTHING. LEST, OF COURSE, THAT YOU MIGHT
BE DOING SOMETHING LIKE THE PILOT WHO KNEW HIS SPEED OF 600 MILES
PER HOUR AND, UPON FINDING OUT THAT HE WAS 180 DEGREES WRONG IN HIS
DIRECTION, WAS, OF COURSE, COMPOUNDING HIS ERROR AT A SPEED OF 1,200
MPH.

SO, LIKE THE WIZARD OF OZ, IT DOES HELP TO KNOW WHERE YOUR SCHOOL
SYSTEM IS GOING BEFORE THE BOARD AND THE SUPERINTENDENT ATTEMPT TO
HARNESS ALL OF THE POWER OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE DISTRICT TO
REACH THOSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.

SO, WHILE THE PHILOSOPHY (MISSION STATEMENT, AS WE CALL IT) AND THE GOALS OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM ARE A NECESSITY, AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT SHOULD COME FIRST AND CLEARLY INDICATE THE INTENT OF THE COMMUNITY FOR ITS SCHOOL SYSTEM, WE WILL NOT DEAL WITH IT FURTHER. NO FURTHER THAN TO PERHAPS ADD THAT IT IS ALSO WISE TO PRIORITIZE YOUR GOALS AND MAYBE EVEN - IF YOU ARE A RELATIVELY SOPHISTICATED DISTRICT - TO INDICATE CONCURRENTLY, THE RELATIVE QUALITY OF ACCOMPLISHMENT IN EACH GOAL AREA ALONG WITH THE PRIORITIZATION OF THEIR IMPORTANCE. THESE SHOULD, OF COURSE, BE DONE THROUGH EXTENSIVE CITIZEN, STAFF, AND STUDENT INPUT.

SECONDLY, WITH THE MISSION AND GOALS DEVELOPED, I WILL ASSUME THAT YOUR BOARD POLICIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE POLICIES ARE UP TO "SNUFF" AND EVEN INCLUDE YOUR LATEST STATEMENTS ON 94-142, OPEN MEETING LAWS, AND DUE PROCESS PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF! SOME PLACE LAYING AROUND YOUR DISTRICT, DEPENDING UPON WHETHER YOU HAVE ONLY ONE BROKEN DOWN SUPERINTENDENT DOING IT ALL OR ONE OF THOSE AND SOME VARIOUS OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL TO SHUFFLE YOUR FEDERAL AND STATE FORMS AROUND, SHOULD BE A SEMBLANCE OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHART. I AM NOT TOO HOT ON ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTS - I GOT A LITTLE SKITTISH OF THOSE HIERARCHY DEVICES IN THE NAVY - BUT THEY DO ALLOW YOU TO PLUG THE ROUND PEGS IN THE ROUND HOLES AND, IF YOU HAVE SOME SQUARE PEGS, TRY AND MAKE SOME SQUARE BOXES, TOO! YOU REALLY DO NEED A "PECKIN ORDER," SO THAT THE SUPERINTENDENT WILL KNOW WHO TO BLAME APPROPRIATELY FOR THE PROBLEMS WHEN HE (OR SHE) GETS CALLED ON THE CARPET.

GETTING BACK TO THE WIZARD OF OZ, SINCE WE DO KNOW WHERE WE WANT TO GO NOW, IT DOES MAKE SOME SENSE THAT WE TRY AND STEER THIS SHIP IN THE GENERAL DIRECTION OF OUR DESTINATION - OR ENDLESS VOYAGE. THIS CALLS FOR THE ORGANIZATION, COORDINATION, EFFICIENT, AND EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF ALL OF THE RESOURCES AT THE SUPERINTENDENT'S HANDS TO MAXIMIZE THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCCEEDING BEST IN THE MISSION ASSIGNED. ONE EFFECTIVE WAY, WE HAVE FOUND, TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, IS TO KIND OF LET, AT LEAST THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, KNOW WHAT ROLE THEY HAVE IN HELPING TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASKS TO BE PERFORMED THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIVELY SHORT AND CONCISE JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR EACH LEADERSHIP ASSIGNMENT.

THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS ONE CAN ACCOMPLISH THIS TASK. INDEED, MANY WELL MANAGED COMPANIES AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS EMPLOY PRIVATE MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS TO COME INTO THEIR SYSTEMS, DEVELOP JOB DESCRIPTIONS, AND TRAIN EMPLOYEES WITHIN THE SYSTEM TO CONTINUE THE UPDATING OF THESE TASKS, WRITE NEW DESCRIPTIONS, EVALUATE BASED UPON THE JOB DESCRIPTIONS, ETC. IF YOU ARE CHEAP, LIKE WE ARE, YOU TRY AND UTILIZE SOME OF THE EXPERTISE IN THESE COMPANIES, STEAL AS MANY OF THEIR IDEAS, TIME AND RESOURCE PERSONS AS YOU CAN, AND THEN MODEL AFTER THEM AND ADAPT THAT WHICH IS APPLICABLE TO EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT. BE SURE, HOWEVER, THAT YOU DO NOT ADOPT WITHOUT ADAPTATION TO THE UNIQUENESS OF THE EDUCATIONAL ENTERPRISE. IF YOU DON'T, I THINK YOU WILL FAIL.

AND LET ME TOSS IN HERE SEVERAL IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS OF WHAT I BELIEVE HELPS TO MAKE SUCCESS IN ANY SCHOOL OPERATION. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION TRUSTS AND BELIEVES IN ITS SUPERINTENDENT AND VICE VERSA.

AND BOTH BELIEVE IN THE QUALITY OF THEIR ADMINISTRATORS AND THE TOTAL WELFARE OF ALL OF THE "TEAM" FOR THE BEST EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM POSSIBLE. THIS "TRUST" ALLOWS A DELEGATION OF CONSIDERABLE (MAXIMUM) AUTHORITY TO THE SUPERINTENDENT WITHIN THE BROADEST CONCEIVABLE PARAMETERS WHICH THE LAW ALLOWS THE BOARD TO ESTABLISH. (NOW IF YOU ARE NOT WITH ME HERE, WE DEFINITELY ARE NOT COMMUNICATING OR ON THE SAME CB CHANNEL!)

AT THIS POINT, YOU MIGHT THINK THAT I'VE BEEN GOING IN CIRCLES AND GIVING YOU EVERY THOUGHT I'VE EVER HAD ABOUT EDUCATION, ADMINISTRATION, AND A LITTLE OF THE WORLD ITSELF. TRUE - BUT WITH A PURPOSE. FOR I BELIEVE IF YOU DO NOT HAVE YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER AS A SUPERINTENDENT WITH THE BOARD, THE STAFF, AND THE DIRECTIONS OF YOUR SCHOOL SYSTEM, DEVELOPING JOB DESCRIPTIONS WON'T BE WORTH A DAMN. JOB DESCRIPTIONS WON'T SOLVE ALL THE WORLD PROBLEMS, EVEN YOUR OWN SCHOOL'S; BUT THEY WILL SERVE AS ENABLERS FROM A STRONG FOUNDATION TO THE FINISHED PRODUCT.

AND SO NOW ON TO THE TOPIC AT HAND: HOW TO DEVELOP JOB DESCRIPTIONS. I WILL PRIMARILY GIVE AN ACCOUNTING OF OUR PROCEDURES ON DESIGNING ADMINISTRATIVE JOB DESCRIPTIONS; FOR I FEEL YOU MUST START WITH THE LEADERSHIP PERSONNEL.

WE STARTED IN OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM OF APPROXIMATELY 8,000 STUDENTS WITH MY, THE SUPERINTENDENT'S, JOB DESCRIPTION WRITTEN AS A BOARD POLICY. THE OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES WERE NOT IN BLACK AND WHITE BUT RATHER A VERBAL UNDERSTANDING. EVERYONE HAD A PRETTY GOOD IDEA OF WHAT EVERYONE ELSE WAS DOING. (HOWEVER, SOMETIMES ONE KNEW MORE

ABOUT WHAT OTHERS WERE DOING OR SUPPOSE TO BE DOING THAN WHAT HIS OR HER OWN ROLE ENTAILED.) IN A SCHOOL SYSTEM OF OUR SIZE, THERE WERE NO GREAT PROBLEMS DUE TO LACK OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS, BUT AT TIMES SOME CONFUSION DID EXIST IN CONCEPTUALIZING ONE'S TOTAL ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES. WE ALSO SAW THE NEED FOR DEFINITIVE TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO BE A PART OF DETERMINING SALARIES (ADMINISTRATORS' SALARIES ARE BASED ENTIRELY ON MERIT) AS PART OF EVALUATION (BETWEEN THE SUPERINTENDENT AND THE ADMINISTRATOR) AND A BASIS FOR DETERMINING ANNUAL JOB TARGETS.

WHERE TO BEGIN? IN OUR ADMINISTRATIVE WORKSHOPS AND MEETINGS, WE SPENT TIME HAVING EACH PERSON KEEP AN ACCOUNTING OF ONE'S TIME AND THEN HAVING THE PERSON WRITE HIS/HER OWN DESCRIPTION. WHAT ALL DOES A PRINCIPAL WRITE DOWN - THE BAND AIDS, THE PHONE CALLS - COFFEE WITH THE COOKS, FIXING THE DITTO? NEXT WE TRIED WORKING IN PAIRS AND HAVING ONE PERSON INTERVIEW THE OTHER AND WRITE UP THAT PERSON'S JOB. SOME WERE GOOD INTERVIEWERS, SOME WERE GOOD WRITERS, SOME WERE NEITHER.

NEXT WE ASSIGNED THREE STAFF MEMBERS TO SPEND A DAY WITH THE PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT OF A LARGE BUSINESS IN OUR COMMUNITY WHERE THEY WROTE JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR OVER 6,000 MANAGEMENT EMPLOYEES. THEIR JOB DESCRIPTIONS WERE TIED TO A NATIONAL COMPANY'S SALARY PROGRAM BASED UPON CERTAIN POINTS DERIVED ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT RESPONSIBILITIES. IN SIMPLER TERMS, POINTS WERE GIVEN ACCORDING TO THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ASSIGNED TO ONE AND THE AMOUNT OF MONEY OVER WHICH THE PERSON HAD CONTROL. IF YOU WOULD WANT A HIGHER SALARY, THEN YOU NEED TO OBTAIN MORE PEOPLE AND DOLLARS UNDER YOUR CONTROL.

BUT THIS WAS NOT OUR STYLE OF OPERATION.

LET ME INTERJECT HERE THAT ALTHOUGH OUR EARLIER ATTEMPTS FAILED IN PRODUCING THE APPROPRIATE RESULTS FOR US, WE LEARNED FROM EACH EXPERIENCE. AT THIS POINT WE FELT THAT -

IT IS NECESSARY TO INVOLVE THE PEOPLE AFFECTED BUT 30 DIFFERENT PEOPLE WRITING IN 30 DIFFERENT STYLES IS NOT THE KEY.

THE FRUSTRATION OF TRYING TO WRITE ONE'S OWN JOB DESCRIPTION HAS SOME POSITIVE EFFECTS. IF NOTHING ELSE, YOU APPRECIATE IT WHEN SOMEONE ELSE WRITES IT FOR YOU.

AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE DID NEXT. WE DESIGNATED ONE PERSON ON OUR STAFF TO WRITE THE JOB DESCRIPTIONS. SHE DEVELOPED ONE FORMAT FOR ALL AND THEN WROTE INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR EACH. AFTER THE INITIAL WRITING, SHE MET WITH EACH PERSON FOR HIS/HER SUGGESTIONS AND THEN SUBMITTED THE DESCRIPTIONS TO THE SUPERINTENDENT FOR FINAL APPROVAL.

A FEW COMMENTS ABOUT THE DESCRIPTIONS.

- ALTHOUGH EACH ADMINISTRATOR HAS AN INDIVIDUALLY DEFINED ROLE, ALL THE STAFF MEMBERS HAVE, IN VARYING DEGREES, SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF: ADMINISTRATION, PERSONNEL, CURRICULUM, STAFF DEVELOPMENT, FINANCE, AND COMMUNICATIONS. YES, THE BUSINESS MANAGER HAS A RESPONSIBILITY LISTED UNDER CURRICULUM: "TO BE KNOWLEDGEABLE OF THE CURRICULUM PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES WITHIN THE DISTRICT, AS WELL AS THE EDUCATIONAL TRENDS NATIONALLY, AS A BASIS FOR BUSINESS AND BUDGETARY SCHOL DECISIONS."

- EACH STAFF MEMBER IS TO BE AN ADMINISTRATOR FIRST, AND A SPECIALIST IN HIS OR HER ASSIGNED ROLE, SECOND.
- (SHOW OR GIVE OUT AN EXAMPLE OF AN ADMINISTRATOR'S JOB DESCRIPTION.)

WHEN ALL WAS SAID AND DONE, WHAT DID WE LEARN OR WHAT ADVICE DO WE HAVE TO GIVE?

1. HAVE ONE WRITER, BUT EACH INDIVIDUAL'S INPUT AND INVOLVEMENT.
2. WE REALIZED THAT EACH PERSON CREATES HIS/HER OWN JOB DESCRIPTION. IF A PERSON LEAVES THE POSITION AND A NEW PERSON COMES IN, THE SKELETON OF THE DESCRIPTION MAY REMAIN, BUT CHANCES ARE STRONG THAT THE DESCRIPTION WILL NEED TO BE REWRITTEN. THIS MAY EVEN HAVE A CHAIN EFFECT ON OTHER POSITIONS. IN OTHER WORDS, YOU FIT THE DESCRIPTION TO THE PERSON, NOT THE PERSON TO THE JOB.
3. DESCRIPTIONS SHOULD BE UNIQUELY YOURS - SERVICE YOUR OWN SCHOOL SYSTEM AND IDEALLY NO TWO DESCRIPTIONS SHOULD BE THE SAME.
4. THE JOB DESCRIPTION SHOULD BE GENERAL ENOUGH TO PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY, BUT DETAILED OR SPECIFIC ENOUGH TO CLEARLY IDENTIFY EACH RESPONSIBILITY (CEREAL FOR BREAKFAST, BUT NOT NECESSARILY RAISIN BRAN).
5. THE JOB DESCRIPTION SHOULD BE COMPLETE IN ONE TO TWO TYPE-WRITTEN PAGES.
6. THE FORMAT FOR EACH DESCRIPTION SHOULD BE THE SAME. FOR
INSTANCE - POSITION:
 TO WHOM RESPONSIBLE:
 FOR WHOM RESPONSIBLE:
 MAIN FUNCTION:
 RESPONSIBILITIES:

7. JOB DESCRIPTIONS SHOULD BE CONTINUALLY UPDATED AND REVISED TO FIT THE PRESENT ASSIGNMENTS.

8. AND REGARDLESS OF STYLE, LENGTH, INPUT, OR OUTPUT, WHAT HAPPENS TO THE JOB DESCRIPTIONS IS PARAMOUNT. IF ADMINISTRATIVE JOB DESCRIPTIONS SERVE AS CHANNELS FOR COMMUNICATIONS, UNDERSTANDING, IMPROVED JOB PERFORMANCE, FUTURE TRAINING AND EVALUATION, THEN JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR EACH STAFF MEMBER SHOULD NEXT BE DEVELOPED AND UTILIZED.

9. SOMETIMES THE STAGES OF DEVELOPING A JOB DESCRIPTION MAY BE MORE PRODUCTIVE THAN THE WRITTEN DESCRIPTION ITSELF. WRITING A DESCRIPTION DEMANDS TAKING A LOOK AT ONE'S POSITION. WHILE DOING THIS, A PERSON CANNOT HELP BUT TAKE AN INTERNAL INVENTORY OF HOW HE OR SHE IS DOING. THAT SELF EXAMINATION MAY BRING BETTER RESULTS THAN THE WRITTEN PAGE ITSELF.

- WE KNOW THE GOALS WE WANT TO ACCOMPLISH!
- WE HAVE ORGANIZED THE HUMAN LEADERSHIP RESOURCES.
- WE HAVE DEFINED THE DISCRETE AND INTERRELATED ROLES OF OUR MANAGEMENT TEAM.

YES, SIR, MR. WIZARD OF OZ - EVEN IN DISNEYLAND, WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE GOING AND WHO IS GOING TO HELP US GET THERE - IN THE MOST EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE MANNER.